

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 MC-02 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /078 W

-----060655Z 078425 /15

R 051200Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY SANA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 890

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USCINCEUR

COMIDEASTFOR

CHUSMTM DHAHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAMA 1311

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MPOL, YE, SA, US, UR

SUBJECT: YAR PRESIDENT ON MIG 21S TO YEMEN

BEGIN SUMMARY. PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI INFORMED ME APRIL 4 THAT
UNLESS HE HAS FIRM COMMITMENT FROM SAUDIS RE PROVISION OF
NEW AIRCRAFT TO YEMENI AIR FORCE HE WILL BE FORCED TO ACCEPT
SOVIET OFFER OF MIG 21S, IF SOVIET OFFER MATERIALIZES. END
SUMMARY.

1. DURING APRIL 4 CONVERSATION (OTHER SUBJECTS BEING
REPORTED SEPTELS) PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI TOOK INITIATIVE TO
RAISE SUBJECT OF THE POSSIBLE ARRIVAL OF MIG 21S IN YEMEN.
SPEAKING IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS ADMIRATION FOR AND SUPPORT
OF THE CURRENT SAUDI POLICY OF WEANING PDRY AND SOMALIA
AWAY FROM THE SOVIETS, AL-HAMDI NOTED THAT WHILE SAUDI
LEADERSHIP IS WISE AND EFFECTIVE, IN ITS LOWER ECHELONS
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THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT IS NOT OF THE SAME CALIBER. AL-HAMDI
SAID THAT IN YEMEN, FOR EXAMPLE, THE SAUDI EMBASSY IS
MANNED BY INDIVISUALS WHO, INSTEAD OF TRYING TO UNDERSTAND
YEMEN'S PROBLEMS AND OF TRYING TO PUT THESE PROBLEMS INTO REGIONAL
CONTEXT, SEE EVERYTHING IN A NARROW MANNER AND REPORT
IN A SIMILAR MANNER TO JIDDA.

2. AL-

HAMDI CONTINUED THAT RECENTLY THE SAUDI EMBASSY HAS BEEN REPORTING THE ARRIVAL OF MAJOR SOVIET ARMS INTO YEMEN WHEN IN REALITY ONLY A FEW ARMORED VEHICLES AND SPARE PARTS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED -- ITEMS ABOUT WHICH HE HAD SPOKEN TO THE SAUDIS OVER A YEAR AGO WHEN HE WAS IN SAUDI ARABIA ON THE HAJ. THE SAUDI EMBASSY HAS ALSO BEEN REPORTING THE ARRIVAL OF MIG 21S, WHICH IS NOT THE CASE. AL-HAMDI WENT ON TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT HE MUST BE FRANK, AS HE HAS ALREADY BEEN IN THE PAST, AND STATE THAT IF HE IS UNABLE WITH SAUDI HELP TO PROVIDE NEW AIRCRAFT FOR THE WEAK YEMENI AIR FORCE, HE WILL BE OBLIGED TO ACCEPT NEW AIRCRAFT FROM WHEREVER HE CAN GET THEM INCLUDING FROM THE SOVIETS. AL-HAMDI INTERJECTED TO STRESS THAT YEMEN'S ARMS ARE STRICTLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING INTERNAL SECURITY IN THE COUNTRY AND NOT INTENDED FOR USE IN ANY OTHER MANNER. HE STRESSED THAT YEMEN IS AN ENEMY OF NO ONE. HE WENT ON TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE WORKING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN YEMEN AND THAT WITHOUT A STRONG ARMY THE EXTREMISTS ON BOTH THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO CONTINUE THEIR ATTEMPTS AT SABOTAGE, CUTTING OF ROADS AND POLITICAL ASSASSINATION. THE SAUDIS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THIS.

3. AL-HAMDI STATED THAT THE SAUDIS KNOW IF THEY CAN PRESENT HIM WITH A FIRM COMMITMENT FOR PROVISION OF AIRCRAFT FOR THE YEMENI AIR FORCE, AS WELL AS A TIME TABLE FOR DELIVERY, HE HAS NO INTENTION OF ACCEPTING SOVIET AIRCRAFT. CONFIDENTIAL

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HE SAID HE IS LIKE A MAN IN THE DESERT WHO ON THE ONE HAND IS BEING PROMISED A GLASS OF ORANGE JUICE, WHICH NEVER SEEMS TO APPEAR, WHILE ON THE OTHER BEING TOLD TO REFUSE A GLASS OF PLAIN WATER WHICH IS ALMOST IN HIS GRASP.

4. I TOLD AL-HAMDI THAT THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT HAS RECENTLY INQUIRED OF THE USG ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF SUPPLYING THE YEMENI AIR FORCE WITH F-5S. THE USG HAS THIS QUESTION UNDER STUDY BUT NO DECISION HAS BEEN MADE AND I HAD NO IDEA WHEN A DECISION WOULD BE MADE. I TOLD HIM THAT AS A FRIEND I HAD TO BE FRANK AND TELL HIM THAT IF THE YARG GOES AHEAD AND ACCEPTS MIG 21S IT IS DOUBTFUL USG WILL EVER AGREE TO THE SALE OF F-5S. I COMMENTED THAT APART FROM POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS, IT SEEMED TO ME UNLIKELY THAT THE YEMENI AIR FORCE COULD ABSORB AT THE SAME TIME A SQUADRON OF SOVIET AND A SQUADRON OF AMERICAN AIRCRAFT, GIVEN THE LACK OF TRAINED PERSONNEL IN BOTH THE FLYING AND THE MAINTENANCE AREAS.

5. AL-HAMDI REPLIED BY ASKING THE QUESTION WHAT WOULD THE US DO IF IT FOUND ITSELF IN A SITUATION OF IMMEDIATE NEED FOR EQUIPMENT AND HAD NO IDEA AS TO WHEN THAT IMMEDIATE NEED WOULD BE FILLED, IF EVER. AL-HAMDI WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE COULD ALWAYS TURN DOWN THE SOVIET OFFER BUT HE HAD TO HAVE SOMETHING FIRM IN HAND IN ORDER TO DO SO AND NOT BE SIMPLY TOLD THAT AIRCRAFT WILL BE PROVIDED AFTER FIVE YEARS. AL-HAMDI ALSO NOTED IN AN ASIDE THAT THUSFAR HE HAS NO IDEA WHEN AND IF THE SOVIETS WILL EVER DELIVER ON THEIR PROMISES EITHER. HE CONCLUDED, HOWEVER, THAT IF THE MIGS ARE DELIVERED AND IF HE HAS NO OTHER FIRM ALTERNATIVE, HE WILL ACCEPT THEM.

6. COMMENT: AL-HAMDI OBVIOUSLY SPELLING OUT RATIONALE FOR EVENTUAL ACCEPANCE OF MIGS. WHILE NO DOUBT THERE STRONG ELEMENT OF PRESSURE IN AL-HAMDI'S PRESENTATION, HIS MAIN CONCERN HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE INTERNAL SECURITY CONFIDENTIAL

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SITUATION OF YEMEN. THE LOYALTY OF THE ARMED FORCES FIGURES HIGHLY IN HIS ASSESSMENT OF THAT SITUATION. CONTINUED INABILITY TO MODERNIZE YEMEN'S AIR FORCE REMAINS MAJOR PREOCCUPATION OF AL-HAMDI WHICH WE AND SAUDIS WILL HAVE TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION AS WE DECIDE EITHER TO PREEMPT ACCEPTANCE OF MIGS OR TO LIVE WITH THEIR EVENTUAL DELIVERY. FURTHER POLICY COMMENT BEING MADE BY SEPTTEL. SCOTES

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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Subject: YAR PRESIDENT ON MIG 21S TO YEMEN BEGIN SUMMARY. PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI INFORMED ME APRIL 4 THAT UNLESS HE HAS FIRM COMMITMENT FROM SAUDIS RE PROVI
TAGS: MASS, MPOL, YE, SA, US, UR, (AL-HAMDI, IBRAHIM)
To: STATE
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